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AN EXHIBITION OF CHINESE PORCELAINS

by J. M. B.

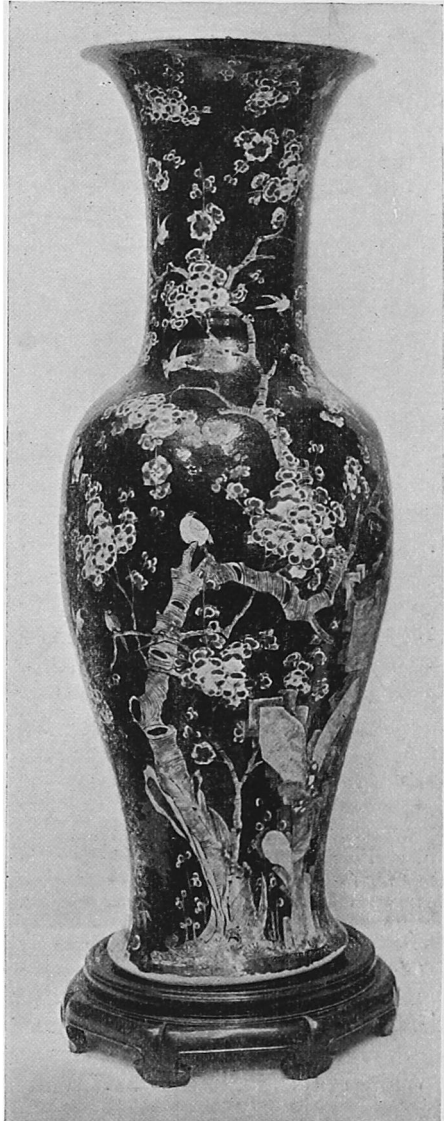
An extraordinary exhibition of Chinese porcelains is on view in New York in the new annex galleries of Messrs. Duveen Brothers, extraordinary in the excellence of the individual specimens displayed and extraordinary in general decorative effect. The lighting of the exhibits is in itself worthy of special mention. Almost every case has its own lights, concealed at the top and adjusted so as to bring out to the best possible advantage the color value of each specimen. On account of the thought and care expended on this point alone the impression made by the series of small galleries is brilliant in the extreme and the student is afforded an additional opportunity to study detail by mirrors placed behind and under the more important pieces.

Each case is treated as a problem in decorative art and the contents grouped with admirable taste and skill; the beautiful case of "peach-blossoms" in the gallery devoted to selections from the collection of Mr. Marsden J. Perry is an instance, being a delight to the eye as an "arrangement," aside from the beauty of the separate pieces. In fact, from the moment one steps from Fifth Avenue into the large entrance hall, designed by McKim, Mead & White, until one leaves by the same noble apartment, the sense of the fine art of decoration is never absent.

This is as it should be. The law that the whole is greater than any part applies to exhibitions as well as to everything else. We have yet to learn, chiefly from Germany, how to arrange picture exhibitions, but the Messrs. Duveen have shown us how to arrange porcelain shows.

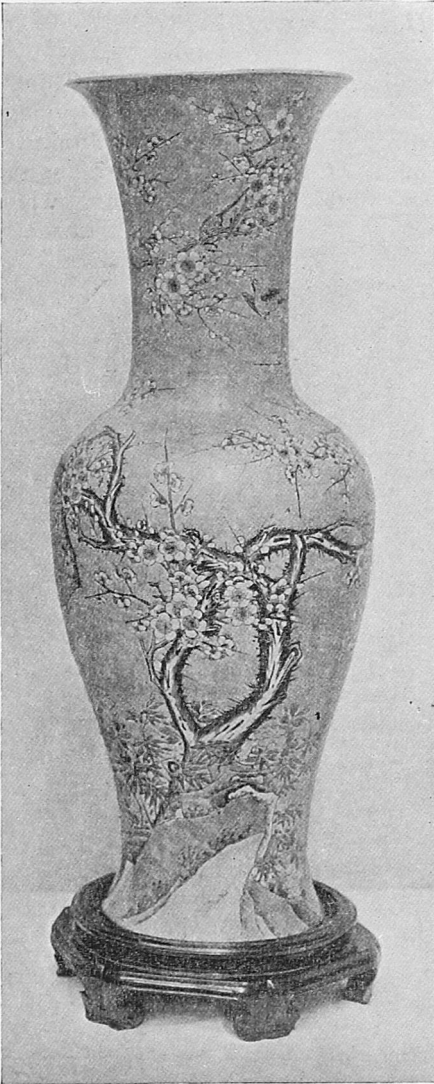
Other valuable features are the presence of an unusual number of well-informed and easily approachable and even sociable gentlemen in the rooms, not only willing but eager to answer questions, also the very complete and competent catalogue. The

preface is an historical account of Chinese porcelain which covers nearly fifty pages and concludes with a valuable "Summary of Dates" of the most notable dynasties and periods in tabular form, which



This is said to be the most valuable vase in the world. It is absolutely unique, being the only known example of red hawthorn. Rare Ching porcelain. Height 31 inches. Loaned by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan. Formerly in the South Kensington museum, Salting loan collection.

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Cabinet Vase. Fine white textured porcelain of Ts'ing (one of the famous superintendents of the imperial factory) with a green enamelled background of rare quality. Period of K'ang Hsi. Height 29 inches. Loaned by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan.

students of the subject will hasten to frame. There are also short chapters on "White Porcelain," "Blue and White," "Powder Blue," "The Introduction of Chinese Porcelain into Europe," and on those porcelains with a black ground, *sang de boeuf*, "peach-blossoms," and single color pieces and early specimens.

The only points in the show which

can be criticised are several errors in dates here, one of which ascribes to the great Emperor K'ang-hsi a reign lasting *one hundred and ten years*, the statement being made on page 28, and repeated on page 29, that he ascended the throne in 1662 at the age of eight and died in 1772—which of course should read 1722.

K'ang-hsi, statesman, general and art patron, was remarkable enough without having lived to be 118. At fourteen he took matters into his own hands and before long had begun the golden age of Chinese porcelains, an era the like of which the world will never see again.

In the midst of the cares of an empire he became one of the most munificent and intelligent patron of the arts the world has ever seen, and the town of Ching-te-Chen, where the porcelain factories were, became the Pittsburg of its day. "Entering the port, the sight is greeted by immense volumes of smoke and flames," wrote Père d'Entrecolles, missionary of the Society of Jesus, who sailed from France in 1700 to explore the unknown country.

There is no mystery about Chinese porcelain and no one claims that all of it is beautiful. It must be borne in mind that in China porcelain bore an official significance. A general returning from a successful campaign would be presented with a large vase from the Imperial factory—green, the color symbol for heroism—instead of a house and lot; and in many other ways was porcelain a part of Chinese life.

So collections can be made for many other reasons than those strictly esthetic. Then there is the question of rarity. It is no secret that the rarest pieces are not always the most beautiful; and the same is true of technique. A piece may be a marvel of technique and yet fail of beauty. All of which serves to remind us that collections may be judged by several standards, each of which has its reason for existence.

Most people feel that Chinese art is something apart from us of this time and

An Exhibition of Oriental Porcelains

country. To prove that all the arts are as one and that there is nothing that cannot be understood about the art of China—that the rules of composition and color are the same here as elsewhere, as they obtain in all countries and all ages—an experiment may be recorded. I took with me to Duveen's on the opening day a man whose work runs along decorative lines but who knows little or nothing regarding Chinese porcelain and asked him to jot down in the course of a careful tour of observation the catalogue numbers of the pieces that he liked best. He did not even see a catalogue. A subsequent analysis of his notes showed that he had chosen, out of the total of 464 numbers, forty-six pieces, twenty-nine of which were of the period of the great K'ang-hsi, the golden age of Chinese porcelain, ten of which were of the succeeding and almost equally brilliant period of his son, who reigned only twelve years, and three of which were of the long period of the next ruler, during whose reign the influence of the great K'ang-hsi, and the



Ginger Jar. Blue hawthorn of fine grained paste of purest white texture with the precious cobalt blue decoration. Period of K'ang Hsi. Height 10¼ inches. Loaned by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan.



ANCIENT POTTERY. On the left: Vase covered with greenish glaze with an ornamented band in relief. Han dynasty. B. C. 206 to A. D. 220. Height 14½ inches.—In the centre: Jar, ancient tripod, with its own cover, the decoration modelled in slight relief. Also of the Han dynasty. Height 10 inches.—On the right: Vase, amphora form, with ring neck and dragon handles; rice color glaze. Unique example of the Sung dynasty, A. D. 960 to 1259. Height 18 inches.

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two geniuses who under him were directors of the Imperial porcelain factory, began to fade. The remaining four were scattered over the two thousand years which comprise the history of this delicate and complicated art.

Although I do not mean to say that the proportion of good work to work less good is as he indicated, it seemed to me remarkable that a man untrained, and

guided solely by personal taste should be able to select out of a large collection these forty-six pieces, forty-two of which were of the best and most famous period.

It demonstrated anew to me the universality, the common-sense, the simplicity of all great art, which after all is only good work; the masterpiece of art being simply the best piece of work of its kind.

A GOTHIC TABLE



THE article in the last number on "Interior Decoration in America," by William Franklyn Paris—through some unaccountable error the type setter was allowed to give it to Walter Paris—led me to look for some ocular demonstration of the argument put forth. It was found in this Gothic table of the *Henry Deux* period, of which the drawing and composition, the relation of all its lines and masses, the excellent adjustment of all its proportions, and the balance of all projections and depressions, declare the master-hand.

It is the design of such individual pieces, in harmony with the decorative woodwork of the interior where the table is to be placed, that demonstrates the need of the decorative architect. Such a Gothic table, or one which I saw for a chapter room at Yale University, is not simply an ephemeral expression of a passing fad or fancy, of which the present work in this country is so representative. It is more enduring in the artistic pleasure which it gives because of the extent of its decorative quality: an artistic imagining has been put into a visible and tangible shape.